

Jonah 3

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[0 : 0 0] Jonah chapter 3. Charles Darwin was reflecting on his many many travels around the globe and! he wrote in his journal, should a voyager chance to be on the verge of shipwreck on some unknown coast,! he will most devoutly pray that the lessons of the missionary will have reached this far.

Isn't that interesting? When the chips are down, what did Charles Darwin trust in? Natural selection? The survival of the fittest? No. The message of the missionary. The message of the missionary today is derided, isn't it, in our culture at every opportunity. It's almost like a swear word to be a missionary. Every documentary you see in TV, on TV, talks about the damage that missionaries have caused to indigenous cultures. And it's fashionable, isn't it, to write off missionary activity as cultural imperialism. It's just not appropriate for today. To be a missionary today is in many ways not the worst thing that you could be. But I want to say it might stand with Charles Darwin this evening. I'll take that out of context. That instead of being made to feel guilty about missionary activity, or the church, or embarrassed, we ought to thank God for it. The day of world missions is not over. In fact, it's still to come. And if you're an any judge about that, then I invite you to look at Jonah chapter 3.

3 ends tonight. The man, the message, and the miracle. First of all, let's look at the man that's going to use Philip, verse 10 of chapter 2. And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. There he is. It's not a very pretty sight, is it? Covered in fish vomit. He spent three days and three nights, not in the Hotel Grand, or the Ritz, or the Nineveh Hilton, but in the belly of a large fish. He must have looked and smelt terrible.

And not only that, he was a Hebrew, and Nineveh was a Syrian. And it seems that he only knows one sentence in a Syrian. Can you look at verse 4? Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. It's not exactly the sentence you need, is it, to win friends and influence people. Apparently those are the only words that he ever spoke in the city of Nineveh. So you compare Jonah with Isaiah, or Jeremiah, and there are pages and pages and pages on there of oracles. The oracle of Jeremiah. But Jonah has only one line to learn. Just five words in Hebrew. I don't know how many words it would have been in a Syrian. But you can just picture him, can't you, making his way in the suburbs. He goes into one shop, and he asks someone, what is a Syrian for overthrow?

And then he goes down a few streets into the center of the city, and he asks someone else, how do you say forty days in your language? And so he puts his sermon together. And maybe those five words in Hebrew are the only words Jonah has spoken in a Syrian. But it was enough, just as God used five smooth stones that David picked up and put his sling to bring down Goliath, so God uses five words in Hebrew to bring this giant city of Nineveh to its knees.

[3 : 5 1] Look what he said in verse four. Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown. And then verse five, and the people of the Lord believed Jonah. It doesn't say that, does it? That's the shock. It doesn't say that. Here's the incredible thing. This very strange looking and smelling man with just a few words of a Syrian wandering through the city streets, and the entire city of Nineveh believed God. God spoke to that city through this man, Jonah. I think that is the most effective evangelistic sermon ever preached. Eight words in English. Eight words, and 120,000 people are converted. That is 15,000 converts per word. 40 more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown.

That's all he said, and it goes viral. And it sparked off an instant revival. And you might think, well this is so far fetched, isn't it? It's so far fetched, these things don't happen.

Well let me tell you, it has happened many, many times in the history of God's people. So children, here's your children's talk, okay? Listen up, stop, whatever you're doing.

In 1859, in Coleraine, Coleraine in Northern Ireland, the 1859 revival is one of the great movements of God in church history. It's part of the second evangelical awakening. It's one of the great revivals that spread all over the world, from the UK to America and far afield. Let me tell you how it started, children. It started in Coleraine, Northern Ireland. And there was a schoolboy under deep conviction of sin, probably I think about 12 years old. And this little boy was so affected that he was unable to concentrate in class and unable to continue in his lessons with his studies. The teacher was a Christian in the class. And the teacher understood what was going on. And so the teacher sent the little boy home with another lad. Another lad who was already a Christian. On the way home, these boys looked at an empty house. And they went in to pray. And at last, the unhappy boy found peace with God. They went back to the school, he returned to the classroom to tell his teacher. And these are the words that he spoke. He said, I'm so happy I have the Lord Jesus in my heart. That's all the boy said.

I'm so happy that I have the Lord Jesus in my heart. And that innocent testimony had an impact on the whole class. Imagine somebody coming into your class, one of the children, and saying, I'm so happy I have the Lord Jesus in my heart. Well, it had a great effect on the class. And boy after boy, it was a boys' school, slipped outside. The teacher was standing on something to look out the window, to see the boys kneeling in prayer all around the school playground.

[7 : 11] Each one apart. The teacher was so overcome, so moved, that he asked the converted boy that he asked to go initially to comfort them. And soon the whole school was in a strange disorder.

And the clergyman, ministers, were thankful. And the ministers remained all day dealing with seekers after peace, children that wanted to know God. Schoolboys, schoolgirls, teachers, parents, neighbors. The school grounds were occupied just before 11 o'clock that night.

On the 7th of June, 1859, an open air meeting, there was a meeting outside, like we have maybe on Drayton Green, where somebody speaks, was held on Fair Hill to hear one or two of the converts. So many thousands attended that it was deemed advisable to divide the crowd into separate meetings, each addressed by the minister of what he not jumbled denomination or law. The people stood motionless until the very last moment when a hearer cried out in distress. Several others, likewise, bowed down, bewildered. The ministers had no similar experience previously, and they scarce knew how to help the distressed in soul and body. The minister spent all day and night in working with those who were in spiritual need. When the sun rose the following day, it was spent in the same manner. But I want you to see tonight, I want you to see just, just some words spoken by a child that sparked a remarkable movement of God.

Just a couple of words spoken with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, that's all it will take to bring Ealing to its knees, and London to its knees. And that is what God uses, isn't it? Not human eloquence, and not slick communication, just a few words. Just one sentence spoken faithfully with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of God came to that place. Do you see what it says in verse 5?

[9 : 26] And the people of Nineveh believed God. And they knew that God was speaking to them. And they made the connection between those few words, yet forty days in Nineveh shall be overthrown, and God.

Now just imagine you go down that Ealing Broadway, and tomorrow you get on the tube, you're going down the escalator, and you notice there's a kind of poster on the side of the escalator. And you see the words, yet another forty days, and Ealing will be destroyed. You wouldn't think of God, would you?

You'd think, what has Boris Johnson done now? Or you'd probably think more likely of terrorist attack. Or maybe some kind of gimmick to kind of get book sports tickets, some UFC thing. But you wouldn't necessarily automatically make the connection between those words and God, but they did. Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown. And I don't want you to underestimate the size of the task that God has given to Jonah. It was a daunting task.

Nineveh was a great city. It was so big, according to verse three, that it took three days to cross. That probably doesn't mean I'm walking three days from one point to the other point. It means three days to crisscross it.

[10 : 53] If you'd go around all the cities, streets and city. It's a huge place. According to verse eleven of chapter four, There's 120,000 people there.

And if you've ever been to the British Museum, you'll know that there's a room there called the Nineveh Gallery. And in that room, in the British Museum, you'll see a milestone taken from the main road in Nineveh.

And the main road in Nineveh apparently was wider than a six-lane motorway. That was the main road. Going through Nineveh, wider than a six-lane motorway, There appears to have been a kind of N25 around Nineveh.

A wall, a hundred foot high. So broad was this wall that it could take three chariots side by side. So you can imagine, to arrive unannounced in a city that size, Is to say the least daunting.

But it wasn't only daunting, it was dangerous. A hundred years later, the prophet Nahum, towards the back of the Old Testament, He describes the noise of the traffic. If you read the book of Nahum, he mentions particularly the violence and the corruption of the city.

[12:02] This is Nahum chapter three. It's a city of blood, totally deceitful, full of plunder, never without prey. The crack of the whip, the rumble of the wheel, the galloping horse, the jolting chariot, The charging horsemen, the flashing sword, the shining spear, heaps of slain, Mounds of corpses, dead bodies without end.

That's Nahum chapter three. You can see it, can't you? They were a wild and brutal bunch of people. History tells us that when the Ninevites took over a town, They would impale the survivors on sticks.

They would often cut off the heads of their enemies, And wear them as ornaments from their neck. It's like IS. And so it's no wonder it is that Jonah has to be told twice to go to Nineveh.

He's as likely to get mugged or mown down by a chariot, Than to make any impression on a place like that. Isn't he? If I was Charles Darwin, I'd want to stay on board the Beagle.

I think, wouldn't you? If I were Jonah, I'd run away to Spain. You can blame him. But look what it says in the opening verse. There's three. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, Saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, And calling out against it the message that I tell you.

[13:20] So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, According to the word of the Lord. Now let's look at the message. Here's the man that God uses. Let's take a closer look at the message that God has given to the city.

In verse 4, Well he sounds just like that crank in Oxford Street. You know the weirdos with sandwich boards, A prophet of doom. Forty days, And Nineveh will be overthrown.

What's the preacher message on that? It is one of the devil's most successful strategies, isn't it? To caricature God's servants. To discredit God's message by making fun of it. And so we all laugh at the man on the sandwich board, Flee from the wrath that come.

And it's worked, hasn't it? The devil's strategy has worked, Because who is preaching a message right now in London today? Nobody, no church I know, Wants to be thought of as a prophet of doom.

[14:21] We have all retreated from that kind of preaching. To claim the circles I move in, Because it's not what people want to hear. It's not the kind of message that fills our church.

We give people who agree what they want to hear. So smile, God loves you, And he's got a wonderful plan for your life. That's what people want to hear. But look again, Look more closely at this message in verse 4.

It's not all doom and gloom, is it? I want you to see that there is mercy mixed with judgment in verse 4. If you look very carefully, It says 40 days.

Yet 40 days. It's only 6 weeks. There's 6 weeks grace here. There's 6 weeks now, To put your house in order.

It's like a final reminder from your electricity company. Pay your bill. Or otherwise you're going to be cut off. And instead of resenting this message, The Ninevites welcomed it.

[15:28] And it strikes a chord with them. They know they are guilty. They know that if disaster is to be averted, They need to get right with Jonah's God. And they've got 6 weeks to do it in. And they are overwhelmed by the kindness of God, To send them a messenger.

And to give them 6 weeks grace. And to give them notice of the judgment that's about to fall on them. That is the sign of Jonah. The sign of Jonah is that a man, Has come back from the dead. And that's our message for the world today. It's a message about a man, Who has come back from the dead. A resurrection preacher. Coming to bring the word of God to the nations.

Isn't that who Jesus is? A man who's gone down into the depths. Down into death itself. And has been raised up again. And God has appointed that man, To judge the world. And he's given notice, Paul says, By raising him from the dead. That's the sign of Jonah. And now God commands all people everywhere, To repent.

[16:32] That is the message we have for Ealing. For London. For the world. That as a race of human beings, We're living on borrowed time.

This is the day of salvation. Now is the acceptable time. Now is the time for us to get right with God. Because there is judgment coming. And God has given us notice, That that judgment is coming, By raising Jesus from the dead. I think there's a really profound misunderstanding, About gospel preaching.

In evangelical churches today. It isn't my job as a preacher, To invite you to judge Jesus. I am not here.

The Christian preacher is not here, To invite you to judge Jesus. I am here to inform you, That Jesus is going to judge you. That is the Christian message.

[17:44] I'm not here to say, Make up your mind about Jesus. You know, Weigh out the pros and the cons. I'm not here to say that to you.

I'm not here to invite you, To judge Jesus. I'm here to tell you, That Jesus is going to judge you. And he's given you time, To do something about it.

He's given you time, To do something about it. That is my message. That is the Christian preacher's message. And that is the message, Paul preached in Athens.

To be honest with you, What do you think about Jesus? Is it relevant? Is it? It doesn't change who Jesus is, For my daughter.

It's interesting to notice, A slightly different word, And the ESV doesn't bring it out, And it should bring it out. The MIV does. But if you notice, There's a slight difference. Let me show it to you, If you've got another version of the Bible, You'll see it.

[18:51] In chapter 3, Verse 2, The word of the Lord came to Jonah, The second time I was saying, Arise, Go to Nineveh, That great city, And call out against it.

The message, That I tell you. It's really, Preach to, Nineveh there.

But if you look in, Chapter 1, Verse 2 of chapter 1, Arise, Go to Nineveh, That great city, And call out against it.

There's a slight difference, In the words of, Chapter 1 and verse, To, Which is, You preach against it. And then in chapter 3, In verse 2, Which the ESV doesn't hide, It says, Call out to it.

There are different words, Literally in the Hebrew. I don't want to make too much, A big difference about it, But I, But I think there is, Quite a big difference, Isn't there, Between being preached at, Preached at, The great city, And preached to, The great city.

[19:55] You'll know, If you've been on the receiving end of that, If somebody's preached at you, And somebody's preached to you, There is a difference. And the difference is in the heart of the preacher.

Because something has happened to Jonah, From chapter 1 and verse 2, To chapter 3 and verse 2. Something's happened that's changed him. Jonah is now, A walking trophy, Of God's grace. Jonah has been through, The judgment of God, In the belly of that fish. He has died to his sin, And he's been raised again, To newness of life. And he comes out, Not to preach at Nineveh, But to preach to Nineveh.

He's no longer a declaimer, He is a pro-claimer. He's a message, He is a message, From God for the city. And there's a sense, In which Jonah discovers Jesus, In the black belly of the fish.

Just like Shabrach, Meshach, And Abednego, Discovered Jesus, In the burning fiery furnace. Do you remember, What he says, In verse 1 of chapter 2, I called out, To the Lord, Out of my distress, And he answered me.

[21:09] Verse 6, Yet you brought my life up, From the pit. O Lord my God, When my life was fading away, I remembered the Lord. Verse 9, A wonderful verse, Which in many ways, Is a summary of the Bible, Is it salvation, Belonging to the Lord.

What does the name Jesus mean? What does it mean? It means exactly that. It means that Jesus, Is the salvation, Of Yahweh, Of Jehovah.

That is what Jonah discovered, In the belly of the fish. And that's what we need, To understand. That the only way, For Nineveh to be saved, Is by Jesus. There is no other name, Given under

heaven, By which, We must be saved.

There is no other way. Whatever culture, They are in, Whichever part of the world, They are in, There is no other way, For people to be saved, Except through Jesus.

And it's always been like that. So Paul argues, In Romans chapter 3, He says, God presented Jesus, As a propitiation, Through faith in his blood. Propitiation, That's the idea, Of someone satisfying, In the anger of God, That the anger of God, Falls on him, On Jesus.

[22 : 27] And it is satisfied, And Paul says in Romans 3, That God presented him, Jesus, As a propitiation, Through faith in his blood, To demonstrate, His righteousness.

Because in his restraint, God passed over, The sins previously committed. The sins of Nineveh. And God presented Jesus, To demonstrate his righteousness, And the prayers of the times, So that he would be, The just, And the justifier, Of those who have faith in Jesus.

It's complicated, But see what Paul is saying. You mustn't think that, God spared the great city of Nineveh, In chapter 3, The wicked, Evil city of Nineveh, Because he was being soft.

You mustn't think that, God was turning a blind eye, To their sin, Sweeping it under the carpet, As if it didn't matter. No, Jesus died, For those Ninevites. God's anger, Was poured out on Jesus, Because of the sins of that city.

The cross is retrospective, As well as prospective. We are saved, Because of what Jesus made, Two thousand years ago. The Ninevites are saved, Because of what Jesus did, On the cross.

[23 : 41] God's anger was satisfied, God was declared, And proved, Justice was declared, And proved by the cross. To be both just, And the justifier, Of ungodly people like us, You see.

So the only way, That people can be saved, Anywhere, At any time, Is through Jesus. So when it says, In verse 10, When God saw, What they did, And how they turned, From their evil way, God relented, Of the disaster, That he had said, He would do to them, And he did not do it.

That is because of Jesus. It's not because, He turned a blind eye, To their wickedness. That is because of Jesus. It's because, Jesus did the Jonah thing, And plunged himself, Into the anger of God for us, And God raised him, From the dead.

And so we've looked, At the man, And the message, Clearly let's look, At the miracle. The miracle that God, Actually performed in Nineveh, Because that is the great miracle, Of the book of Jonah, It's not the fish.

That's not the great miracle, The miracle in the book of Jonah, Is what happened in the city, Because it's almost unprecedented. Look at verse 5. People of Nineveh believed God, They called for a fast, sackcloth, From the greatest of them, To the least of them.

[25 : 06] The word reads, The king of Nineveh, And he arose from his throne, And moved his robe, And covered himself with sackcloth, And sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation, And published through Nineveh, By the decree of the king, And his nobles, Like neither man, Nor beast, Nor herd, Nor flock, Taste anything, Let them not feed, Or drink water, But let man and beast, Be covered with sackcloth, And let them call out, Mightily to God, They'll ever turn from his evil way, And from the violence of his hands.

They dressed, Didn't they, As if they were going to a funeral, Sackcloth is the dress of mourning, And they all dressed, As if they were going to a funeral, If God says, We're as good as dead, Then we're going to act, As if we're as good as dead, And that is really, What they were doing, By putting on sackcloth, And then the king issues, Is to create Nineveh, By order of the king, Either man, Nor beast, Herd, Nor flock, Chase anything, Let them not feed, Or drink water, But let man and beast, Be covered with sackcloth, And let them call out, Mightily to God, Let everyone turn from his evil way, And from the violence, That is in his hands, Who knows, God may turn and relent, And turn from his fierce anger, So that we may not perish, This cruel, Proud, Pagan, And violent city, Right across the social pile, From the beast in the fields, To the king on his throne, They turn to God, Roland Hill, Was one of the early Methodists, He's a very colourful character, And one of the Methodist preachers, Early Methodist preachers, Said this, He said, I don't care for man's repentance, If his dog and cat, Are not the better for it, And something happened in this city, That violent, Violent city, By the note, William Wilberforce, And his friends in the Clapham sect, That started the RSPCA, It wasn't called the RSPCA then, But the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, But it was William Wilberforce, That did it, In 1904, In the Welsh Revival, There was a slowdown, In mining production, It's a true story, In that the ponies, That used to work underground, Stopped working, The reason they stopped working, Is because their masters stopped swearing, They couldn't understand their instructions anymore, And production went down, For two years,

In 1904 to 1906, Wales was known as the land of the white gloves, Because the magistrates, When they didn't have any trials, Wore white gloves, And for two years, Something happened, There were lots of funny, Odd and weird things in that revival, But there was an authentic move of the Lord, And something like that happens in Nineveh, Do you see, Why I say this is the real miracle, And if it happened in Nineveh, It can happen in healing, The people in Nineveh, Repented, And they believed God, And they turned to God, Look at verse 9, Who knows, Who knows, God's judgment might not be the end for us, We richly deserve it, They said Amen to Jonah's message, They acknowledged that they are sinners, That they deserve nothing, But God's angry punishment for their sins, They acknowledge that, That's why they wear sackcloth and ashes, And yet there is a note of hope, Is there, Who knows, Do you see what they're doing there, Who knows, They're not being presumptuous and arrogant, I think it's Catherine the Grease of Russia, Who said, When one brave preacher, Warned her of the judgment to come, She said, Well God will forgive, That's his job, But that's not the attitude, The Nineveh said, They are not being presumptuous here, They are throwing themselves, On the mercy of God, Who knows, He might relent, And that is faith, That is not presumption, Repentance and faith, Always go together, And they are the two sides, Of the same coin, The Virgin put it, Repentance is the tear, In the eye of faith, Isn't that beautiful, Repentance is the tear, In the eye of faith, And the Nineveh are turning to God, And they are turning with real, Heartfelt repentance, They are genuinely sorry, For their sin, And they are turning to the God of Jonah, And Israel, Who knows, They say, They throw themselves on his mercy, And they are not taking anything for granted, [29 : 44] They are not presuming on it, And none of us deserve God's mercy, It's not a basic human right, For God to forgive us, The exercise of mercy, For God, It is optional, And that's why it's mercy, Mercy is God dealing with us, Not as we deserve, And the Ninevites didn't assume, That God was bound to forgive them, They nevertheless, Throw themselves on the mercy of God, And we are told in verse 10, When God saw what they did, How they turned from their evil ways, That God relented of the disaster, That he said he would do to them, And he did not do it, And now if God did that for Nineveh, Don't you think he could do that, For Ealing in London, What else is going to touch, The needs of the city, People grow up, They are born, And they grow up, And they live in this borough, And they die,

And they never give God a thought, What else is going to touch, This city, Where so many, Many people, That live on your street, And you work with, They are untouched, By the message of the gospel, About 15 years ago, There was a massive pressure, Amongst the evangelicals, That we wanted to see, 10% of London, Converted, They got it from the Sydney diocese, And there was lots of missions planned, There were lots of good things, It's nowhere near that, We've utterly, Utterly failed, Of course nobody ever talks about it, It's going to be an airbrush from history, And we need to face up to that, Don't we?

And how we need to cry out to God, You can call it revival if you want, For revival where? Was it revival in Nineveh? No, There wasn't a revival in Nineveh, There was a visitation, Of the spirit of God, There was an extraordinary work, Of God's salvation, But there was no revival, You can't revive something, That's not been alive, Can you?

The revival was in Jonah, The word of God, Came to Jonah a second time, And it's the church, That needs reviving, It's us, That needs reviving, It's me, God has said go, Jesus says go, We say no, I prefer not to, Spirit of the living God, Fall afresh on me, Break me, Melt me, Mould me, Fill me, Spirit of the living God, Fall afresh on me, Let's pray.